DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 614 CS 508 512

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TITLE Dramatic Theory: A Selected, Annotated Basic Bibliography.
INSTITUTION Speech Communication Association, Annandale, Va.
PUB DATE May 84
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Annotated Bibliographies; Anthologies; *Drama; *Dramatics; Intellectual Disciplines; Literary Criticism; Literary Genres
IDENTIFIERS *Dramatic Theory

ABSTRACT

Noting that "reputable" theorists differ widely on even the most fundamental assumptions concerning the scope, principles, and methods proper for studies in dramatic theory, this annotated bibliography provides an overview of the discipline and suggests the wide range of opinions and methods present within it. While emphasizing recent theoretical statements, the bibliography also includes significant historical documents and reductive commentaries. The bibliography lists eight anthologies (published between 1947 and 1974) and annotations of 31 individual works (published between 1920 and 1981). (RS)

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DRAMATIC THEORY

A Selected, Annotated Basic Bibliography (May 1984)

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DRAMATIC THEORY: THE STATE OF THE FIELD AND ITS FUTURE

Although artists and scholars of the drama generally agree that dramatic-theory is (or should be) somehow distinct from literary theory or rhetorical theory, as well as from a theory of art or film, they have not reached any substantial agreement about the parameters appropriate to the field. As a result, equally reputable theorists differ widely on even the most fundamental assumptions concerning the scope, principles, and methods proper for studies in dramatic theory. Consequently, some scholars view the state of the discipline with alarm, seeing in its great variety a situation so chaotic as to be ultimately debilitating. Others consider the expanding theoretical literature as a sign of a reawakening interest in the field which could lead to a revival of its former strength and vigor.

CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC ITEMS

An effort was made to provide an overview of the discipline and to suggest the wide range of opinions and methods present within it. Although the emphasis of the bibliography is clearly in recent theoretical statements, two other sorts of items are offered: significant historical documents, to suggest the continuity of a tradition; and reductive commentaries, to survey and organize existing theories and theorists.

A. Anthologies

Space does not permit individual annotation of these volumes. Each, however, offers generous selections from works by influential and representative theorists, and each includes some combination of introductory essays, headnotes, annotations, and bibliographies that will aid a reader who wishes to pursue any one of the theories in greater detail. Although there is considerable overlap among the volumes in terms of the authors included, the particular selections are usually different. When taken together, these volumes are an introduction to the major texts from the past and thus form a good collection of basic sources for the study of dramatic theory.

Allen, Gary Wilson, and Clark, Harry Hayden. Literary Criticism: Pope to Croce. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962.

Bate, W.J. Criticism: The Major Texts (enlarged edition). New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc. 1970.

Clark, Barret H. European Theories of the Drama, with a Supplement on the American Drama (rev. ed.). New York: Crown Publishers, 1947.

Dukore, Bernard F. Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1974.

Gilbert, Allan H. Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962.

Hardison, O.B., Jr. Modern Continental Literary Criticism. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962.

Lauter, Paul (ed.) Theories of Comedy. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1964.

B. Individual Works

Aristotle. On the Art of Poetry. Translated by Ingram Bywater. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1920. Aristotle's Poetics is without question the single most important work in dramatic theory. The many interpretations and misinterpretations of this document form the basis of much of the discipline's history. In the Poetics, Aristotle offers a definition of tragedy, identifies its six parts, and investigates their natures and interrelationships.

Artaud, Antonin. The Theatre and Its Double. Translated by Victor Corte. London: Calder and Boyars, 1970. With the possible exception of Brecht's "Epic Theatre," Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" was the most influential doctrine of the 1960's and 1970's. Throughout these collected essays, the French poet/playright/theoriest pleads for a new theatre, one which is metaphysical, cruel, and plague-like in its effect upon man.

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Barry, Jackson G. Dramatic Structure: The Shaping of Experience. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. Barry's goal is to develop a theory of drama using the insights of both aestheticians and practitioners of theatre. The result is an analysis of drama in terms of its structure, beginning at a gross level and moving reductively to specific organizational units. To clarify his approach, Barry compares dramatic structures with those of narrative, poetry, and music, and compares his theory with those of Aristotle, Heilman, Frye, and Langer.

Beckerman, Bernard. Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis. Beckerman argues that conventional dramatic criticism analyzes a play horizontally, meaning that separate strands (plot, character, etc.) are examined in a linear fashion. Such an approach obscures the play as a "sequence of total experiences." Beckerman therefore proposes, develops, and explicates a vertical method of analysis, one based on the segment (a unit of the play defined in time), its components, and their interactions.

Brecht, Bertolt. Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic. Translated and edited by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964. Brecht, with Artaud, was probably the most influential theorist of the first half of this century. Willett translates, selects, arranges, and provides explanatory notes for Brecht's major theoretical writings on theatre and drama. The chronological presentation of the materials permits a reader to trace the development and shifting meanings of key concepts (e. g., alienation, dialetical theatre, epic theatre, and historicizing).

Brockett, Oscar G. "Poetry as Instrument," Rhetoric and Poetic. Edited by Donald C. Bryant. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1964. In an excellent introduction to dramatic theory, Brockett identifies three basic approaches to criticism using as his differentia the critic's underlying assumptions about the nature of drama: as expression, as object, and as instrument. Appropriate questions, suitable kinds of evidence, and particular strengths and weaknesses of the instrumental approach are then explored and evaluated provocatively.

Brook, Peter. The Empty Space. New York: Atheneum, 1968. In four essays Brook describes a deadly theatre (always bad, often commercial), a holy theatre (where the invisible is made visible), a rough theatre (popular, robust, explosive, and often crude), and an immediate theatre (Brook's own preference). He argues finally that in order to save the theatre, most of the current (1968) practices must be swept away and replaced with the openness and honesty of "empty hands . . . (to) show that there is really nothing up our sleeves."

Burke, Kenneth. "Antony in Behalf of the Play." The Philosophy of Literary Form. (rev. ed.) New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1957. Burke, a "new rhetorician," examines Marc Antony's "Friends, Romans, Countrymen" speech, using the persona of Antony speaking as a rhetorician interested in the process of appealing to an audience. In so doing, Burke offers a concrete example of his critical method (developed principally in A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives) applied to drama.

Burns, Elizabeth. Theatricality: A Study of Conventions in The Theatre and in Social Life. London: Longman Group, Ltd., 1972. Drawing on theatrical history, the "Chicago School tradition" of sociology, and the sociology of theatre, Burns examines the meaning and significance of the familiar analogy of life and theatre. Through an analysis of conventions that govern both, she explores the "theatricality" of all action and argues that conventions of life and art interpenetrate.

Cole, David. The Theatrical Event: A Mythos, A Vocabulary, A Perspective. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975. Cole attempts to "render coherent" the theatrical event by treating it as "an opportunity to experience imaginative life as physical presence." Relying heavily on the works of Eliade and later Kirby (see pg. 3), Cole argues that the event is born when an actor passes "from shamanic voyager to possessed vehicle," a transformation necessarily and desireably productive of ambivalent feelings in the audience.

Crane, R. S. "The Varieties of Dramatic Criticism." Context and Craft of Drama. Edited by Robert W. Corrigan and James L. Rosenberg. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1964; reprinted from Carleton Drama Review, I (1956), 22-38. Crane argues the necessity of examining all critical statements in terms of the "compulsive first principles" of the critics. To illustrate his thesis, Crane identifies two distinct critical traditions (Platonic and Aristotelian), samples the kinds of criticism emerging from each, and explains the differences in terms of the critics' underlying assumptions.

Fergusson, Francis. The Idea of a Theatre, A Study of Ten Plays: The Art of Drama in Changing Perspective. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949. In this early but important work, Fergusson proposes an "'Idea of Theatre,' both to understand the masterpieces of drama at its best, and to get our bearing in our own times (1949)." Critical essays on Oedipus, Berenice, Tristun and Isolde, and Hamlet provide the base on which Fergusson builds his argument that our modern drama, whether practiced by Ibsen or Chekhov, Cocteau or Eliot, is based on incomplete or partial perspectives in contrast to the encompassing vision of earlier writers.

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Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. Frye contends that if criticism is ever to be more than a history of changing tastes, some systematic method of literary study is needed. Despite many valid critical techniques, the work of critics is not mutually supportive since no comprehensive view of criticism exists. Frye suggests that archetypal criticism has a central role in eliminating the barriers among existing approaches and in systematizing diverse kinds of critical inquiries.

Grotowski, Jerzy. Towards a Poor Theatre. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968. His search for a method of training actors led Grotowski to questions about the nature of theatre. He concludes that theatre is not a composite, synthetic art, and pleads for a stripping away of all inessential elements in production (sets, lights, etc.). Theatre depends only on "actor-spectator relationship of. . .direct 'live' communion." Real theatre, then, is poor, its actors holy, and its audience in search of self-knowledge.

Heffner, Hubert C. "Pirandello and the Nature of Man." Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism. Edited by Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965. Reprinted from Tulane Drama Review, I (June 1957), 23-40. Heffner distinguishes a fictional character from a living personality and then provides a useful paradigm for the study of characterization in drama. Finally, the theoretical model is applied to Six Characters in order to illume Pirandello's dramaturgy and its relation to his conception of man.

Heilman, Robert Bechtold. Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968. Tragedy and melodrama are not only artistic structures but also general categories of human experience. With this hypothesis, Heilman examines a wide range of dramas and real-life situations. He asserts that the tragic point of view recognizes the validity of conflicting imperatives while the melodramatic avoids basic inner conflicts and (largely through synecdoche) presents a sensation of wholeness.

Hermassi, Karen. Polity and Theatre in Historical Perspective. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. Drama is political, according to Hermassi, since it deals in social truths and since it causes a public to "recollect" its past. The consideration of individual plays against their social backdrops leads to the conclusion that vigorous theatre is related to times of emerging political structures.

Kirby, E. T. Ur-drama. The Origins of Theatre. New York: New York University Press, 1975. After dismissing the so-called ritual theory of the origin of drama (as popularized by Murray and others based on Frazer), Kirby suggests that theatre developed out of shamanism. In support of his position, he examines the origin and evolution of shamanistic theatre and then identifies specific instances in India, China, Japan, Greece, and Europe where he believes the transition from shaman ritual to drama can be demonstrated.

Lander, Suzanne K. Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from "Philosophy in a New Key." New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953. In Philosophy in a New Key, Langer developed a theory of symbols. In Feeling and Form, she extends her theory and constructs "an intellectual framework for philosophical studies. . .relating to art." Of particular interest to students of drama are chapters 13, 17, 18, and 19, in which she explores the nature of language arts, the unique attributes of drama (poetry in the mode of action), the "comic rhythm," and the "tragic rhythm." This is a most influential book.

Olson, Elder. Tragedy and the Theory of Drama. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968. A clear, concise, and readable inquiry into the principles of drama, "those ultimates which underly both the theory and practice of the art." Assuming the playwright's point of view, Olson probes the nature of drama, dramatic action, plot, probability, incident, character, representation, dialogue and dramatic form. Specific analyses of selected plays follow and reveal some implications of Olson's approach, which is, at its core, neo-Aristotelian. See also his The Theory of Comedy, 1968.

Peacock, Ronald. The Art of Drama. London: Routledge and Kegan, 1960. Peacock works from two assumptions: (1) drama, a composite art, uses several arts to one end; and (2) an adequate exploration of successful association of these arts requires a single aesthetic principle which underlies them all. Arguing that images and imagery are the unifying principle, Peacock builds a sophisticated theory of art and then tests it systematically against each relevant art form and finally against drama, the composite art.

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Schechner, Richard. Public Domain. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969. Schechner is generally regarded as a leading theorist and practitioner of contemporary theatre. Drawing heavily on research in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and on the methods of structuralism, Schechner seeks a "new Poetics," one which can accommodate the "new theatre" (e. g., happenings, environmental theatre, guerrilla events, etc.). Only by breaking the bonds of its written tradition, Schechner argues, can the theatre return "to an older tradition--performance," which is essentially a social and political activity.

Schechner, Richard and Schuman, Mady (eds.) Ritual, Play, and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre. New York: Seabury Press, 1976. This potpourri of essays investigates the role of ritual, play and performance in cultures of varying geographies and complexities. Heavily based on anthropological studies and assumptions, the collection represents well a bias of those theorists of theatrical performance who prefer to stress theatre's sociological rather than its aesthetic dimensions.

Styan, J. L. The Elements of Drama. Cambridge: The University Press, 1967. An important author who early advocated the currently popular production (rather than literary) criticism, Styan argues that drama consists of "infinite combinations and permutations" of impressions moving through time. The task of a critic, then, is to study the interaction of text, actor, and audience. By suggesting relevant questions and analyzing selected excerpts, Styan clarifies his theory. See also his Drama, Stage, and Audience, 1975, in which he continues the inquiry and concludes that it is the audience that "throws the switch" and so converts text into performance.

_____. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice, vol. 1, Realism and Naturalism; vol. 2, Symbolism, Surrealism, and the Absurd; vol. 3, Expressionism and Epic Theatre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. In these volumes Styan set out to explore "the bearing of theory on practice, and of practice on theory." Through judicious reference to promptbooks, production photographs, play reviews, and historical references, he succeeded well in summarizing the major theoretical positions of the modern theatre and in illustrating how these positions found expression in the produced plays on their time.

Szanto, George H. Theatre and Propaganda. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978. Because propaganda can be either agitational or (more usually) integrative, all theatre is, according to Szanto, propagandistic. The theatrical mainstream is thus a powerful tool for sustaining and celebrating the status quo, while most experimentalists aim to alter one or most aspects of it.

Weissman, Philip. Creativity in the Theatre: A Psychoanalytic Study. New York: Basic Books, 1965. In this idiosyncratic work, Weissman constructs psychological profiles for "typical" actors, directors, and playwrights as well as psychological portraits of selected dramatic characters and real-life theatre artists. To counteract skepticism that he anticipates will greet his efforts, Weissman offers an apologia for the field of psychoanalytic criticism and reviews briefly Freud's forays into criticism.

Wellek, Rene. "The Main Trends of Twentieth-Century Criticism." Concepts of Criticism by Rene Wellek. Edited by Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963. Wellek identifies six general trends in modern criticism: Marxist, Psychoanalytic, linguistic and stylistic, organistic formalism, myth, and philosophical. The key assumptions, techniques, and practitioners of each are succinctly presented. This is a useful overview of modern theory.

Williams, Raymond. Modern Tragedy. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966. Modern Tragedy represents good Marxist criticism. In Part I, Williams traces the emergence of a gap between the theory and the experience of tragedy; he then argues the contemporary relationship between tragedy and revolution. In Part II Williams tests his hypothesis by charting the development and decline of six recent visions of tragedy.

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